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THE LIFE AND DEATH OF A CHRISTIAN ARE OUR TEACHERS.

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235

THE FUNERAL SERMON

OF

ELDER DAVID M. WILSON,

THE USEFUL LAYMAN AND UNASSUMING BENEFACTOR OF WASHINGTON CITY;

DELIVERED IN THE

WESTERN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

MARCH 9, 1856,

copy 235
BY THE PASTOR, REV. T. N. HASKELL;

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED

THE FUNERAL ADDRESS,

copy 235
BY REV. B. SUNDERLAND, D. D.,

Delivered on the Burial Day, March 1, 1856.



WASHINGTON, D. C.
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1856.

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Ms. R. 14.2.9.36

CORRESPONDENCE.

WASHINGTON, *March 31, 1856.*

DEAR SIR: The undersigned having been appointed, at a meeting of the congregation of the Western Presbyterian Church held on the 16th instant, a committee to communicate to you their desire to have published your obituary sermon on their late beloved brother and elder, Mr. David M. Wilson, and to make the necessary arrangements for printing the same on the most favorable terms, as the avails are to be given to the bereaved widow of the departed one—in the discharge of this duty, we take this method of making known the wishes of the congregation, and to respectfully request your compliance therewith as early as, with convenience to yourself, you can prepare the work for the press, with a short appendix, which we suggest might accompany it.

In our opinion, such a work would prove a gratification to a large circle of friends which this excellent man could number in our community, not confined to sect or party, as illustrating a good practical example of a self-denying, zealous, yet inoffensive Christian, and, we may add, would be personally gratifying to each of us.

With many assurances of respect and regard, we remain your obedient servants,

WM. T. STEIGER,
THOS. F. HARKNESS,
S. L. LEWIS,

Committee.

Rev. THOS. N. HASKELL,

Pastor of the Western Presbyterian Church, Washington, D. C.

WASHINGTON, *April 4, 1856.*

GENTLEMEN: Your letter of March 31st is before me; and with this reply you will receive the manuscript copy of the sermon for which you ask. Although the discourse was not intended for the press, I do not find it in my heart to withhold the facts which it contains from the public, especially not against the expressed wish of my people. Instead of the *appendix*, which you suggest, I find it as congenial to my feelings, and less likely to disappoint any public anticipation that a more extended memoir will some time be written, to *preface* the sermon with the touching address delivered on the day of burial by Rev. Dr. SUNDERLAND.

Hoping that the statements which you give to the public by publishing this sermon may be found generally correct and become highly useful, and that the tribute so spontaneously paid to the memory of one whom I venerated and loved may be more than justified by the verdict of a grateful community, I have the honor of subscribing myself your servant in the Christian ministry,

T. N. HASKELL.

MESSRS. W. T. STEIGER, T. F. HARKNESS, and S. L. LEWIS,

Committee of Western Presbyterian Church and Congregation.

FUNERAL ADDRESS.

BY REV. BYRON SUNDERLAND, D. D.,

PASTOR OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

Again—and it is yet again that we come to the burial of a standard-bearer in Israel. Oh! how inscrutable are the ways of God! My dear brother in the Lord, my dear friends of this flock of Christ, my dear friends of the family so suddenly bereaved—what shall I say? My own soul, bowed in sorrow four times during my brief pastorate in Washington at the loss of an Elder, this day can enter into your grief. Our father was all humanly speaking to us in the relations he sustained—the only Elder of this infant Church; a counsellor of the ministry, and a friend of the poor; a lover of Christ and his cause; a man of prayer and faith and all good works. He seemed a host in himself. But God has taken him—so long useful, so long honored, in labors abundant, in watchings continual—in prayers and tears and blessings. It is our loss: it is the loss of your Pastor, of this church, of all the churches—yea, and of the city itself. That benevolent organization of which he was so much the expression, the functionary—they, too, have lost a strong man. Many a poor creature that needed help, and words of comfort, and light, and hope, and all heavenly things, has lost a friend indeed.

I cannot speak it as it is—but he loved to do good. It was his meat and drink to do the will of the great Master. Long years ago he had given up all selfish secular pursuits. His very life was to do good to others. You all know it. It is written on the tablets of many hearts. I hope your Pastor will write it in a book, and send it down to many generations. Let the surviving colporteurs have it—at once an illustration, proof, and impulse of their sublime mission to the needy. Oh, how he nursed and tended all the germs of this Church, away back there years ago, when he could not see what God had in reserve, and the way was dark. Before some of us ever came on this ground, he was here surveying, like Abraham of old, the promised land, and pitching the tent and rearing the altar where prayer went up. Would he might have lived to see the temple finished and filled with the glory of God, then to have said, “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.”

But God, who sees all things, knows best. The workmen cease, but the work shall go on. And he knew it all. He was submissive to the divine word—like Moses, content to die in sight of Canaan, and be sepulchered where and as God should appoint. An aged man, venerable among all the children, ripe in the experience of divine things, with a foretaste of heaven ever in his heart; no sacrifice too great, no labor too severe, to follow in the path of duty, the knowledge of which came to him so direct and clear from the communion with God—he did verily walk with God all the day. He was a practical Christian, and had no time for anything but devotion to Jesus. And when the time came, he laid him down. He was ready to be offered—delightful views of Christ and heaven about him like radiant clouds gilding the sunset, and care for the dear Church to the last. “Tell them,” said he, “to think more of the realities of eternity;” and when he said it he was all suffused with those realities. Heaven was no idle dream, nor his own hope in Jesus.

“While on his breast I lean my head,
And breathe my life out sweetly there.”

This he could say, ay, and felt to his inmost soul. Death had no terrors for such a man. He had long been ready for it, and his work was done every night, that if the Master called before the cock-crowing, he might be ready with his account, and say, delighted, “Here, Lord, am I.” Oh! how he loved the sanctuary—the praises of Zion, and all there is in her courts—“the communion sweet and dear esteem” of God’s people. I have seen him when his heart glowed, and he said, “This is the house of God, and the gate of heaven.” Asleep in Jesus now!—he rests from his labors, and his works do follow him. It was a life by faith; and by it, being dead, he yet speaketh, and so will speak in the latest history of the Churches of Washington.

Probably no man ever lived or died in this city who is so linked with all christian memories and all works of self-sacrificing charity as Elder David M. Wilson. If there be such, I have not known it. He was everywhere, where good was to be done. His argument for the Christian faith was one life-long service. He acted ever as though all was true and unquestionable that God had said. He never doubted it. His spirit was that of Paul the Apostle—a strong apostolic spirit was always about him. He rejoiced in the kingdom of Christ, and heard that it extended, with sincere gratitude and delight. On this account, and because he was everywhere doing good, we shall miss the man—that aged form, spending its last remaining strength for Jesus. No place will be without some association of his name, and many shall call him

blessed. Blessed now, indeed, for he has departed to be with Christ. The strait he was in, God's providence has solved at last. We can say nothing against it, though we weep. He was destined now to a nobler ministry, and his post is vacant. In looking round, we ask, Where is he on whose shoulders the mantle will descend? Who will be our Elder Wilson now? Who will look after the poor as he did? Who will scatter the bread of life among all the hungry people as he did? And when we try to answer, it is looking up—"Thou God only knowest!" Oh! how often we are driven to God only: and it is right. We ought to lean on the immortal arm, for only He, the Head over all, can help and succor us. Let us not despond under this blow: it is for the trial of our faith. God will send the form of the Fourth to be with us in this furnace of affliction. God will say to his people, Now your strong man is gone, lean on me!—look up whence he and all my servants derived their help. It is a mysterious but it is a still gracious economy. Let us trust it. And as we carry the sacred ashes of our venerated father to the grave, let us feel that we plant there in the fresh mould of consecrated ground a noble seed, that will spring up gloriously in the morning of the resurrection. And oh! may God this day warm our hearts by the spirit of sanctified memories which yet linger and will ever linger hereabouts, of the beloved and now glorified Elder who lives in heaven.

My brethren and friends, I am come here almost from a sick bed, and from the recollection of similar scenes in my own Church, to condole with you. I am not the one to speak of that whole history, now closed up for eternity. There are others here who will do justice to the life and worth of the departed man of God. To them I leave this work: to God I commend you.



ELDER D. M. WILSON,
The Useful Lapman and the Unassuming Benefactor.

SERMON.

“Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace.” “He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the righteous, even they both are an abomination unto the Lord.” Ps. xxxvii, 37; Prov. xvii, 15.

We have assembled to-day to cherish the memory of a departed Christian; to mark his progress toward heaven; to behold him in his uprightness, as he lived among us; and to consider his end, which is peace. What an object to behold and mark carefully—a superior example, a rare experience, a CHRISTIAN MAN!

There are many instructive analogies in nature: there is much wisdom in the progressive arts; but there is a sublime climax in Christian character. To mark the features of an extended landscape—to behold its valleys, verdant with the hues of spring, or its woods and uplands golden with the tints of autumn sunset; to scan the lofty grandeur of a mountain, as it wears the clouds burnished with lightnings for a breastplate and eternal ice-cliffs for a helmet—to behold nature in any of its beauty and sublimity, is profitable employment for the spirit of man. It often lifts the soul to nature's God, and subdues it before His majesty. To look at the *secondary* works of God, invented by the human mind, and trace the lineaments of skill drawn out in minute and intricate machines; or to stand before the more stupendous works of art, and behold them rising in their proportions, true to man, to God, and nature—this is also beneficial to the mind and heart. It speaks at once of man, of God, and providence. It points to the genius of the architect; and he falls back upon previous discoveries, and upon Deity.

All material excellencies of art or nature are, however, meaningless without mind to apprehend them, as well as to originate them. A rational being is, therefore, superior to all material objects; and we mark the outlines and the exertions of a towering intellect with instinctive interest. Rising still above the intellectual, stands the moral, basking in eternal sunlight; and higher than the stature of ordinary virtue, stands, last and best, the Christ-like—the recovering image of the Godhead. More instructive than the landscape, more majestic than

cloud-capt mountains, more noble than any work of art, is a human being with a soul in him—with the Spirit of God upon him. Man is, on earth, the noblest work of God;

“The Christian is the highest style of man;”

and our deceased brother was a very superior Christian. Thus we have rising up before us for our consideration to-day one of the noblest objects which we could behold—a life of self-denying labor for the salvation of men; a symmetrical, guileless, Christian character, developed, sanctified before us in a world of duty, discipline, and death. “Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright;” condemn not the righteous, nor call any iniquity just; but in the fear of the Lord, with careful, honest discrimination, let us consider the man of God who is no more among us, “because God hath taken him.”

With the strict equity of estimate which my text enjoins, let us mark—

- I. The man as he lived—“an upright, perfect man.”
- II. Consider him as he died—“for the end of that man is peace.”
- III. Observe the lessons taught by such a life and death; for they are our teachers.

I. I am to give a sketch of Elder Wilson’s life.

It is a singular providence which has called a comparative stranger, who has known the deceased personally not quite two years, to rehearse to you the labors and incidents of a life of near sixty years, more than half of which has been spent in this city, and in affectionate intercourse with the most of my audience. The dispensation is to me, in this respect, a touching antithesis, and makes my service at once a difficult, melancholy, and pleasing task, from which, under the circumstances, it were wrong for me to retreat.

My first knowledge of the deceased was in April of 1854. One day, when passing an hour at the Crystal Palace, New York, an elder from one of the largest churches in that city met me; and having heard of my invitation to this Church enterprise in Washington, desired to inform me that Washington was his spiritual birthplace; that he first united with a Church of Christ in this city; and that there was an elder in that Church who was instrumental in his conversion. This fact interested me deeply. I inquired concerning the faithful layman with minuteness. The standing in this community, the talent, habits, manner, and spirit of the man, were all subjects of inquiry, and were faithfully and, in most respects, accurately described. He spoke dis-

paragingly of him only in the following statement: Said he, "If that man is to be associated with you in the work of planting a new Church, he will break you down before you have become acclimated, for his zeal in evangelizing Washington knows no bounds." I had heard of public men and pastors here, had even seen doctors of divinity from the Federal City, but I had seen nor heard anything which seemed so much like a morning ray of destiny as that brief allusion to the man who has been to me, the past year, the dearest friend of my sex. I came to your city the 10th of May following, visited these grounds before sunrise the next day, learned from some source the vicinity of the small edifice where the germs of this Church began in a prayer-meeting conducted by the deceased, and met him for the first time during that day. Our personal acquaintance began then, and though very brief, it has been very intimate: had it been less affectionate, my testimony concerning him might be less partial, but not more sincere. I believe him to have been a REMARKABLE *Christian*—I know him to have been a *righteous man*. My testimony must be almost unqualifiedly in his favor. Let those only condemn him who fear not God; for to condemn the righteous and to approve of wrong are both "abomination in the sight of the Lord." The brevity of our acquaintance renders it impossible for me to sketch the life of the deceased from memory. I have, therefore, gathered written and oral testimony as much as I was able during the past week, and have selected from the knowledge thus gained a few leading facts. The following sketch is but a brief abstract from the surprising amount of interesting material collected in so short a time. His life was graven on the hearts of a frank community, and, since his burial, those hearts have beaten freely, and disclosed in rich detail the records of that life—enough, almost, so soon, to fill a volume with most thrilling incidents.

The ancestors of David Morris Wilson came from Scotland in the early history of this country. For three generations back, the male members of the family have been men distinguished for piety, and have possessed large public confidence. His grandfather, Captain David Wilson, was a commissioned officer in the Revolutionary war, and died an elder of the Presbyterian Church in Snow Hill, Maryland. His uncle, Major Ephraim K. Wilson, was elected to various offices of public trust, and was, it is believed, ever faithful to the trusts confided to him. His father, Elder James Wilson, was for a long time previous to his death an officer and a shining light in the Presbyterian Church at Princess Ann. His mother was a watchful, praying woman—a mother in Israel; and in the line of ancestry we recognize "pious women not a few." While the words of the British statesman may

not be true in this country, that "they who never look back to their ancestors, will never look forward to their posterity," still, in all lands and ages, parental faithfulness is the richest legacy; and even the remembrance of an honored ancestry keeps many young men from sinking into permanent degradation: that, and the memory of maternal prayer and a family altar, are the rallying power of many who have temporarily fallen. This was true in the early history of the deceased. He owed much at different times to his regard for the paternal name—still more to his regard for parental piety. His parents and grandparents were the noblest of repute in their vicinity, but, what was far better, they were among the beloved of God, and members of the household of faith; and he admired and appreciated the sentiment so often repeated:

"My boast is not that I deduce my birth
From loins enthroned and rulers of the earth;
But higher far my proud pretensions rise—
The son of parents passed into the skies."

He was born January 13, 1798, in Somerset county, Eastern Shore, Maryland, and at an early age came to Georgetown as a hatter's apprentice. While there a youthful stranger, with no one near to care for his soul, one of the elders of the Bridge street Church became deeply interested in him; and through his pious solicitude for him, the youth was brought into the fold of Christ, and became identified with the Church of which Rev. Dr. Balch was pastor. Mr. Wilson made his first profession of faith there, when about eighteen years of age. The following year, however, he removed to Maryland, received his material patrimony, became worldly, neglected his covenant vows, spent much time in sporting and the chase, grew fond of ruinous excitements, and was not a stranger to the social glass. He was in the full heat of youthful blood, fond of any stimulant to his large impulses; and his young life flowed on with impetuosity, and gushed out at every opportunity for exertion. He passed many months, and even a year or two, a devotee of the most exciting, and, for young men generally, the most dangerous amusements. He pursued these with that surprising ardor which ever constituted a vital element in his character. Often did he leave his bed while the stars were still visible to organize a fox hunt. He would collect his companions in the chase, and lead the pursuit of the luckless objects of his winged frenzy through marsh and field and forest, through storm and heat, through all the live-long day, nor "slacken his speed or abate his ardor" till the game was taken. He never knew how to pursue an object in vain, or to cease pursuit till the end was gained.

Many times he endangered his life by his unrivalled enthusiasm, and more than once barely escaped sudden death. One time, when riding at the greatest speed, his horse ran so near an inclined tree as to cleave from his back his rider, and throw him breathless to the ground with the greatest violence. At another, he came near being drowned when fording a river—his stubborn steed turning with the current, and refusing to set for the shore. Such narrow escapes from death were *almost* enough to awaken him from the wild revery in which he was dissolving the very chit of his manhood. Still life was too much a revery to allow even his dangers to appear real. This whole period is the dream-life chapter in his history. His dream, however, was reaching the climax where the sleeper awakes and cries, "Behold, it is a dream!" He had reached a point beyond which he dared not pass. He stood aloft: his brain was dizzy!—beneath him in dismal silence yawned the abyss of ruin!

Oh! when one stands upon some jutting, lofty ledge,
And trembling leans his bust beyond the dizzy edge,
And thoughts romantic, wild, in fierce succession creep

Through his impetuous soul, and bid him leap
Down on the broken rocks in the chaotic deep
Below—how heavenly is the touch of unseen hands

Upon the wild, bewildered dreamer's arm,
When timely caution, like a spirit's voice, commands,
And speaking out in the terrific passion-storm,
Says, "Peace! Be still!" and "Do thyself no harm!"

Such was the hand of Providence and the preached word, when Mr. Wilson one Sabbath morning was induced to accompany the lady in whose family he boarded to the place of public worship. It was the communion day of a Methodist quarterly meeting. His companions, "dead in trespasses and sins," were numerous about him, and little expecting any manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit and the truth upon *him*. He did not anticipate it. He was then, though far from being openly immoral and profane, a man undaunted by the future, and unmoved by narrow escapes from death. He knew there was an eternity near him, but its *realities* stood in a maze before him, and seemed unreal. He knew the vows of God were upon him, but he was in the deepest sleep of indifference to the real solemnity and eternal force of those vows. A man of meagre natural and acquired abilities was occupying the pulpit; but the preacher, though neither genius nor scholar, was a Christian, and was made the wisdom and power of God, that the excellency and honor might be of God and not of man. From his lips, on that occasion, came the solemn appeals, "Turn ye! turn

ye! Why will ye die?" "Awake, thou that sleepest, and call upon thy God!" These words were the Holy Spirit's voice, and uttered just in time. The young man, standing on the verge of perdition, heard the voice—'twas meant for him—and turned to see who spake, and lo! the son of God! The emblems of his broken body and shed blood—the memorials of his death—were on the table, and all the lovers of the Redeemer were invited to celebrate his sufferings. This was irresistible. The rescued man arose, knelt at the table, and celebrated the death of Him "whom *he* had pierced"—whom he had even "*crucified afresh*, and put to open shame." This seemed to some an impious act; but it was the effort of a man to regain the shore when he has slept and floated too near the rapids—the God-inspired effort of the prodigal to "come to himself," and to "arise and go unto his father." This was the great epoch in Mr. Wilson's history, and deserves more prominence than can now be given it. Here began that indomitable "newness of life" which impelled him incessantly until we saw him lie down to die. His mind henceforth acted more intensely on divine things than it had ever before in his dream of vanities. His plighted vows are renewed; and instead of again sleeping in sin, or sitting at ease in Zion, he is now awake, and also *at work*. The restless ardor of the youth is now developed in the resistless energy of the man of God. His former impetuous life now flows on like a river, and his righteousness like the waves of the sea. His very presence throws a charm about the Christian name. He is "clothed and in his right mind"—a man supremely devoted to the true end of his being; and is now as energetic in the discharge of duty as he had before been in the strange feats of that moral somnambulism, the mad dream of earthly pleasure. Upon his own recovery, his interest in the conversion of others was immediate and intense; and such interest is seldom fruitless.

In a few months the landlady of the public house where he boarded was converted through his influence in the family. Her sister, a lady now residing in this city, and whose cheerful piety administered comfort to the suffering Prof. B. B. Edwards, when he journeyed south to die, was deeply impressed by his experience at that time, and afterwards converted in his own house.

The ardor of his piety kindled the love of God afresh in many lukewarm hearts in his vicinity; and his wicked companions beheld the change, but understood it not, and some inquired, "What does this mean? That man *is* changed!" He was no more in pursuit of the beasts of the commons, but eager to catch men, and carry them in his arms of faith back to God and his favor. The man who once led his companions in the chase, is now eager to lead them to Calvary; and

the basest and most bigoted men have ever since that time acknowledged

“The occupation dearest to his heart
Was to encourage goodness;”

that he lived for others, not himself, and that he would rather *suffer* than *do* wrong.

Near this time, in 1821, he was married, having chosen one to be his companion, until he should be separated from her by death, who could sympathize with him in his yearnings for human welfare, and bear with Christian fortitude domestic sacrifices for the cause of Christ—one whose natural sisters were his spiritual children, converted to God by his fidelity. A transparent man himself, he took other men at their word in matters of religion, and made his associates aware of the great burden of his heart. Men felt it impolitic to make to so true a man false professions of piety, for he looked so eagerly for *fruits* also, that, on further intercourse, their own consciences would convict them of “lying against the Holy Ghost.” From the memorable renewal of his covenant vows before described, he was deeply studious of ways and means to win men back to the path toward heaven. The expedients to which he would resort, as a private Christian, were often unique and interesting, and sometimes wonderfully effective. Being neither opposed to what are called “new measures,” nor particularly enthusiastic in their favor, he could work with any legitimate measure, old or new, which he thought God would own and honor; and then he would fall back for crowning efficiency upon preaching, prayer, example, personal effort. All whom he knew shared in his sympathy, and confided so implicitly in his motives that he could say with good effect what were unwise for some men to utter. In all his variety of personal and social effort, men knew he desired a single object—their salvation; and they felt that whatever he said or did was a sacrificial offering for their good. Thirsting intensely for conversions as a ruling passion, he still failed not to appreciate the necessities of Christian growth and ripeness for heaven. It might, therefore, be as truly said of him as of the great good man for whom the words were first written—

“He watched, and wept, and prayed for all;
And as a bird each fond endearment tries
To tempt her new-fledged offspring to the skies,
He tried each art, reproved each dull delay,
Allured to brighter worlds, and *led* the way.”

The language of his example was like an earnest, full, and finished dialect, in which the distinguishing peculiarity is the verb of action—springing from a single term, and admitting of motion in a uniform

direction—upward. Heaven was the home of his aspirations, and desire to do good the secret of his untiring zeal as he pursued his pilgrimage. Though an unassuming man, he ever said, from the celerity and uniformity of his motion, “*Come,*” not “*Go.*” He was never outstripped in the chase—he could not be surpassed in his zeal to do good. His divine commission to be a leader in the works of piety was evinced before he left Maryland; but his sphere of usefulness there was necessarily limited. God, in His wisdom, directed his thoughts towards a field adequate to the largeness of his heart and the full range of his philanthropy. In 1823, he removed with his family to Washington. Here he entered at once upon the work for which nature and grace had fitted him. Soon after his settlement, he united with the Second Presbyterian Church, and much endeared himself to the pastor, who was a man full of faith and the Holy Ghost, and blest as the instrument of good in many revivals of religion. With such a pastor, brother Wilson could not fail to be familiar, and to such, from the very nature of the case, he and his memory were predestined to be dear.

We find him, in 1824, associated with Christians in a great variety of religious and benevolent efforts for the moral improvement and temporal comfort of the masses. He was a leader in the Sabbath school of his own Church; he organized and sustained the first colored Sunday school in the city; commenced and sustained weekly prayer-meetings among the neglected colored people, and in various destitute neighborhoods of the white population; planted the germs and watered with his tears the growing vines of several Churches; was interested and active in every department of city missions within his range; was a superior collector for the Church, an excellent spiritual counsellor in the session, a remarkable devotee to early prayer. He knew God had said, “*Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters;*” so he sought to do good by all legitimate means, and found the promised blessing always in his cup of joy. In all departments of effort he worked hard and well: from the first to last he was instant in season, out of season, faithful, self-sacrificing, even unto death.

It is impossible to incorporate in this discourse the full chapter which should be recorded concerning each department of his labors just enumerated. Several spheres of usefulness must pass with the mere allusion to them. The full measure of his successes in them all, or indeed in any one of them, cannot be ascertained. The limits of the present sketch are adequate to only a fractional part of them. I will confine myself chiefly to those concerning which I have at present the most authentic facts, and these will illustrate his untiring zeal and fidelity in all.

1. His worldly pursuits may not be made prominent, for they were never his idols; nor should they be omitted, for they were subordinately sacred; and he was never a man "slothful in business," but "his own hands ministered to his necessities." Being by trade a hatter, he labored as such for several years after his first settlement in Washington, exhibiting the three noble traits of the mechanic—honesty, industry, and frugality. His confinement at this work, and his exertions on the Sabbath, and times of night services, were undermining his constitution: the confinement of his trade especially was manifestly hastening the progress of pulmonary disease to which he was constitutionally predisposed. His health became at length so precarious that he was induced to go to sea for his recovery. He went first on a voyage to Cuba, which proved so beneficial that he hoped by another of similar length he might wholly regain the health and vigor which he sought. Accordingly he made arrangements to sail again, and repeat the painful absence of several months from his family and those religious associations which were to him so dear. He was to sail from the port of New York on the morning of a given day; his appointment to the office of assistant clerk of the vessel was already secured, and he was on hand at New York in due time to enter upon the duties of his office; but by the fraud of the captain, who had just before met a nephew whom he wished to have the benefits of the appointment, Mr. Wilson was unable to procure access to his post in the true sphere of his commission. He was thus compelled to abandon his voyage or submit to a menial position, and spend the whole time of the expedition under the arbitrary control of the man who dared, in the New York harbor, and in open day, perpetrate upon him an act of cruel robbery. Of course he chose to stay upon the land and trust to Providence, rather than submit himself to the treacherous sea, under the command of a still more treacherous captain. The vessel sailed without him. He stood upon the wharf, in feeble health, among strangers, wounded by cruel disappointment and a sense of personal and unmerited injury inflicted on him without cause, and he saw the vessel shove off to sea, and her spread sails pass beneath the visible horizon—then he turned to ask, "*What shall I do?*"

The Angel of the Covenant, who stood by Cornelius in his family worship, and spake to Ananias in the blindness of Saul, was evidently near him, saying, "Go into such a street, and it shall be told thee what thou shalt do." He obeyed at least a providential suggestion, and soon met in the street a gentleman from Boston with whom he had held sweet intercourse in this city, who became immediately his benefactor. This coincident resulted in his establishment in a prominent, and,

for several years, successful business on Pennsylvania avenue. He was immediately provided with a competency for his family, and the means of contributing liberally of time and money to benevolent objects, and even largely to the erection of the Church in which he worshipped, and for the ingathering of the congregation and support of the minister. In the mean time, intelligence came from that vessel in which he had hoped perfectly to recover his health. It had been visited with the severest scourge. The captain and his nephew and many of the crew died of yellow fever, and were buried in a foreign port. He had been excluded from such a fate by the rude hand of an ungodly wretch—nay, he had been held back from it in the hand of God his Father; his life was spared; his spheres of usefulness enlarged and multiplied; he had suffered disappointment for the best results. He learned by that momentary reversion of his prospects to confide more fully in an All-wise Providence, who shapes events so that all things work together for good to his people; and that disappointment in a distant city, which led his steps in a new and nobler path, was in its results much like a later reversion in his financial prospects, which was really the transition to the brightest chapters of his life. During one of those terrible crises in which so many useful business men have failed in the history of this country, his financial affairs became embarrassed, and he gave all his carefully-acquired and hard-earned effects to secure his creditors as far as possible against loss. One who was immediately involved in his embarrassments, and who was very familiar with his business habits, bears this testimony: "He was a man rigidly honest to the last far-thing. In no instance did he resort to measures to extricate himself which were in the slightest degree of questionable honesty."

The reputation of the Christian name and the sacredness of unqualified virtue were more dear to him, and stood more commanding before him, than "houses or lands, wife or children—yea, than his own life also." In adversity as well as prosperity he "shunned the very appearance of evil." He appreciated the highest order of realities—that virtue which is above price, and that wise providence which unfolds the unerring pleasure of God. At this time his undoubted integrity was all the fortune he had left him, and this commended him to men in every rank of life and circumstances. On account of it, his friends had little difficulty in securing his appointment under President Jackson as captain of police at the Capitol. This office he held until the Presidency of Mr. Polk. Whether his deposition from an office which he had so long held, and dignified by his example and rendered important by his diligence, was right or not, is not a point for investigation now.

However, many in Washington can appreciate the murmuring inquiry of Coleridge when he says—

“How seldom here an honest man inherits
Honor or wealth with all his worth and pains!
It sounds like stories from the land of spirits
If any man obtain that which he merits,
Or any merit that which he obtains.”

Whether Mr. Wilson's successor was more deserving or not, it is certain that he gained a position which his predecessor had in part *elevated* to his aspirations, and had occupied so successfully that even a false witness could scarcely be suborned against him; and he saw the deposed man left in a single hour with no money but the promissory notes of heaven, and no prospects but special providence. All these are like incidents too common to need our comment.

Mr. Wilson was turned out of office. He took one of those *conditional* promissory notes, signed by the Cashier of the Universe, and read it. It was this:

“In all thy ways acknowledge him,
And He shall direct thy paths.”

He had seen this before—had often drawn upon it, and knew it good. It was enough for him.

“He committed his way unto the Lord,
And He directed his steps,”

And soon all doubts were removed. It was manifestly no longer the divine pleasure to retain him as the paid guardian of politicians, and a guide of strangers who throng the Capitol to test the lotteries of office or ambition, or to exclaim, “See what manner of stones and what buildings are here!” He was to carry from house to house what the Holy Ghost brought to earth from heaven—“the Word of God”—“the love of Christ.”

The indications of Providence at this time were as definite to him as was the Saviour's first visit to the poor fishermen of Galilee who were mending their tattered nets: *they* left their nets immediately, and followed the divine Being who had called them; *he* followed immediately a new line of providences, and was never left without a providence to follow. His secular employments had long been a part of his religion, and he knew how to “worship at work;” but now a new order of service is assigned him: his employment is religion indeed: his work is to worship. From house to house he bears the “Word of God and

lifts the voice of prayer ;” and as he goes, men point to him, and say, “ Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile !”

2. “ The Bible Society of Washington City” was at this time looking for a man of just his indomitable and consecrated energies, and he was disencumbered at the very time to serve them. While some men go mourning and murmuring all their days because they cannot find their sphere or rise to their imagined level, he, having committed his way to the Lord, found his sphere always prepared before him, and a providence standing ready to guide his steps into it. The executive committee of the Bible Society elected Mr. Wilson as their visiting agent, and notified him of his appointment on the 5th of May, 1847, immediately subsequent to his deposition from office at the Capitol. The report of the executive committee, published May 29, informs that us he “ immediately entered upon his duties as agent,” and in three weeks had canvassed the entire 5th ward, having visited in that short time five hundred and seventy-three families, and found ninety-two destitute of any portion of the sacred Scriptures. Of these destitute families fourteen refused to receive any portion of the Bible, and seventy-eight purchased or received gratuitously Bibles or New Testaments. Of the ninety-two destitute families, forty-four declared themselves in the habit of attending some place of public worship, and forty-eight not accustomed to meet with worshipping assemblies anywhere. One hundred children of suitable age to attend Sabbath school were found, whose parents acknowledged they were not attending any such schools. He kept a journal exhibiting the names and precise residences of all the destitute families visited ; the number of persons in each family ; the number of readers in each ; and the denomination and color ; the apparent neglect of the intellectual and moral training of the children, and many other memoranda relating to the general domestic morals of the city. To be successful in this work, required a thorough, prudent, and deeply pious man. Such a person, even strangers, and those little acquainted with human nature, took the indefatigable Bible agent to be at the first interview ; and the success which attended his first month’s labor, were a suitable preface to the many months of unsurpassed usefulness which he afterward spent in the service of the society. It was not practicable for this association, whose sphere was in a measure limited, to employ such a man permanently, for a long series of years ; but when his usefulness was not augmented by engagements for other kindred societies, his services were eagerly sought by the Bible Society, and as cheerfully and efficiently rendered at appropriate intervals, until the last year of his life.

I find in a column of the public prints dated December 24, 1852, the

following testimonial: "The Bible Society of this city has in employ as general agent Mr. David M. Wilson, long, generally, and most favorably known throughout this city. He has completed the exploration of the first ward; where, among one thousand one hundred and sixty-eight families and places of business visited, he found one hundred and four families destitute of any portion of the sacred Scriptures, all of which, except fourteen that refused, were supplied by sale or gift. He also found in these families one hundred and forty-two children of suitable age not attending any Sabbath schools. The heads of about one-half of the destitute families professed to attend regularly some place of public worship; the others generally confessed that they did not, or but very seldom if ever attend. The Bibles and Testaments distributed were received with apparently real desire to possess them, and with promises faithfully to use them. A number of interesting incidents resulting from his former supply of the same ward have been met with by the agent, showing that the good seed then sown had yielded blessed fruit, rejoicing and cheering him in his work. He has commenced the exploration and supply of the second ward, and the managers of the society bespeak for him, in his benevolent mission to do good and to communicate, the kind reception and generous support of all whom he may visit. They feel called upon to acknowledge the general spirit of liberality manifested in their contributions by the citizens of the first ward. The work now in progress is evidently necessary and proper; and though the compensation paid to the agent is small, yet enlarged contributions are necessary to purchase the great number of Bibles and Testaments required; while the surplus, if any, is immediately transmitted to the parent society for the general supply." This introduces us at once to a series of reports in the handwriting of the agent himself, which describe, ward by ward, his second exploration of the entire city. The results of his labors in the first ward are stated in the quotation just given. In the second ward he visited one thousand two hundred and thirty-three families and places of business. Of these one hundred and three were found destitute; seventeen refused to receive on any terms [all but one Roman Catholics.] The number of children not attending any Sabbath school were one hundred and thirty-nine; the parents of seventy-two of these promised to send them to some place of Sabbath instruction soon; seventy-nine heads of the destitute families can read intelligibly the Bibles furnished them; thirty-six said they attended public worship on the Sabbath, and sixty-seven acknowledged they did not.

In the third ward the number of families and places of business visited was one thousand one hundred and sixty-eight. Of these he found

one hundred and nine destitute of any part of the Bible; and twenty-six, all Roman Catholics but two, who called themselves "German Rationalists," refused to receive copies on any terms. Ninety children were found not connected with any Sunday school, and the attendance of forty-eight of them was promised. Of the destitute families forty-nine said they were attendants at the house of God on the Sabbath, and sixty declared they were not. In the families supplied there were one hundred intelligent readers.

In the fourth ward he visited one thousand six hundred and seventy families and places of business, and found one hundred and ninety-seven destitute; sixty-eight, all Romanists, refused to receive the Bible even as a present. Seventy-four of the destitute were accustomed to attend public worship, and one hundred and fifty-four could read. In that ward he found one hundred and twenty-nine children not attending Sunday school. The parents of seventy-one of them gave assurances that they should attend, and the parents of fifty-eight would make no promise concerning them.

The families and places of business visited in the fifth ward numbered one thousand and fifty. In these were one hundred and fourteen destitute of the Scriptures, thirty-one of whom, all Roman Catholics, refused to receive on any terms. In the families supplied, one hundred and thirty-two persons could read the inspired word left with them. Sixty-four of the destitute families said they did not attend church, and forty of them reported general attendance on the Sabbath. Ninety-four children were found in that ward not attending upon religious instruction even on the Sabbath, and the parents of forty-nine of these gave assurance that they should subsequently be sent to Sunday schools.

In canvassing the sixth ward, he visited eight hundred and forty families and places of business; found sixty-nine destitute; seven refused to receive on any terms. Among those supplied were eighty-four readers, and in the ward were eighty-one children of proper age who did not attend Sabbath schools, concerning the subsequent attendance of forty of whom assurances were given by the parents.

In the seventh ward, he visited one thousand three hundred and thirty families and places of business, finding one hundred and sixty-six destitute; furnishing gratuitously seventy Bibles and forty-four Testaments, and gaining assurances that eighty-three out of one hundred and forty-eight neglected children should be sent to Sabbath school. Sixty of the destitute families said they were in the habit of attending public worship on the Lord's day, and one hundred and three by their own confession were found to be habitual neglecters of all public and private worship.

In the last of the reports from which these facts have been deduced, the agent concludes with these memorable words of thanksgiving: "In this brief report of the seventh and last ward, completing the visiting and supply of the entire city with the Word of God, I would, in conclusion, record my gratitude to the God of the Bible for preserving me to complete this vastly important work, and though I cannot hope that all has been accomplished that I have earnestly desired and sought, I have the fullest assurance that great good has been done, and much more abundant good will be secured by this agency. To Him whose work it is, and whose servants we are, to Him be all the praise forever."

Thus we have followed him through one of his faithful explorations of the whole Capital of this great and nominally Christian nation; and the marginal table,* which I have computed from his own journal as reported, will give the moral aspect of the metropolis in pretty true mathematical proportions as it was at that time.

3. We may next consider our brother's labors in connection with the City Missionary Society, which was really the offspring of his philanthropy, and the very soul of which was his ardent piety and zeal.

These discoveries made by him as agent of the City Bible Society, so affected the pious people and especially the pastors of Washington, that the inquiry became general and earnest, "What shall be done to promote the cause of evangelical religion among the destitute of this city?" A similar question is proposed by every Christian citizen concerning the entire country, and especially by those residing in cities, concerning the cities in which they live. It is a solemn fact, deduced from the most reliable estimates, that not more than *one-third* of all the population of the United States are *ever*, on any one *pleasant* Sabbath, convened in places of public worship. In cities the ratio is still more

* Table.

| | 1st Ward. | 2d Ward. | 3d Ward. | 4th Ward. | 5th Ward. | 6th Ward. | 7th Ward. | Total. |
|--|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------|
| Families and places of business visited..... | 1168 | 1233 | 1168 | 1670 | 1050 | 840 | 1330 | 8459 |
| Those destitute of the Word of God..... | 104 | 103 | 109 | 197 | 114 | 69 | 166 | 862 |
| Those who refused copies on any terms..... | 14 | 17 | 26 | 68 | 31 | 7 | 12 | 175 |
| The number of destitute readers supplied.... | 115 | 79 | 100 | 154 | 132 | 84 | 165 | 829 |
| Children in no Sabbath school..... | 142 | 139 | 90 | 129 | 94 | 81 | 148 | 823 |
| The number of such whose future attendance was promised..... | 63 | 72 | 48 | 71 | 49 | 48 | 83 | 434 |
| The number of the destitute who attend Church..... | 61 | 36 | 49 | 74 | 40 | 35 | 60 | 345 |
| The number of the destitute who do not attend..... | 39 | 67 | 60 | 80 | 64 | 50 | 108 | 463 |

forbidding. I might speak of London, in evangelical England, with her thirty thousand "Costers," who are as literal heathens as the Hindoos, and her many hundreds of thousands equally degraded, who never hear the Gospel, nor enter the house of God unless to pilfer or to beg. But my remarks are concerning our own cities, and Washington as the metropolis of the evangelical America. We need not go abroad for examples of moral want—our land is full. Illustrations might be gathered from the cities of the Pilgrims, of the Mississippi valley, or of the Southern States; but the city with whose moral aspect I am most familiar, is New York, and the moral condition of that commercial emporium, numerically expressed, suggests what may yet be true of this metropolis, unless God shall raise up many municipal benefactors like the deceased city missionary. In that city, at the time Mr. Wilson was canvassing Washington, I collected many facts like the following: At least one hundred thousand of her population had no stated places of worship. The houses of worship erected were so inadequate, that if all the people who were able to attend Church (making all due allowance for the protection of residences, ministry to the sick, &c.) had convened for public religious services on any given day, there would have been at least one hundred thousand people who could not be seated in the sanctuary for want of room, making necessary one hundred new churches, competent to seat each one thousand persons, in order to meet a moral want which was then pressing upon that people. A numerical estimate of the city morals made a showing of more religious destitution than existed at the same time in the Sandwich Islands. In the latter an average of more than one in *five* persons represented the ratio of church membership, and in the former the average was only one member to *ten* citizens. In the five oldest wards of the city were eighty-four thousand people and but eighteen churches; and in the Sandwich Islands, with the same numerical population, were twenty-two churches and twenty-five ministers.

When adults were thus morally destitute, juvenile depravity was of course abundant. The grand jury reported that year: "Of the higher grades of felony, *four-fifths* of the complaints examined have been against *minors*." The schedule for the city prison under the same date showed sixteen thousand criminals, four thousand under twenty-one years of age, and *one thousand under fifteen years*. Out of twelve thousand children in *one* ward between the ages of five and sixteen, the captain of police reported only seven thousand attending day schools, and two thousand five hundred attending Sabbath schools, having *five thousand* children in that ward without advantages of a common education, and *nine thousand* destitute of all public religious influence. In perfect

keeping with this, was the official statement of the chief of police for the following year, showing that more than *four thousand commitments of minors* and nearly *eight thousand* juvenile arrests had been made in twelve months.

These facts may seem foreign to my hearers and to my subject, but they bear directly upon the importance of the question which Mr. Wilson's disclosures had started in the public mind in Washington. Thirty years before, New York was young, and christian enterprise had centered there. Although there were some vile sections with destitute and abandoned people, it was believed the scum of vice and poverty would soon be cleansed or float away through the various means of livelihood presented in our broad and sparsely-populated country. The *results* in New York, however, showed differently, and they illustrate the importance of incessant effort. A general analogy of circumstances and of the relations of cause and effect, exists in all growing cities when compared with each other. In respect to morals, this is especially true of New York and Washington. Both are national centres, both have their causes, their captains and cadets of crime. The one is a grand ware and market house of states and nations, the other is the Federal City, standing on a hill where it cannot be hid, and yet sitting beneath the eaves of the world, with every negative influence bearing down upon its private thrift and evangelical truthfulness and piety. The growing capital of a great nation naturally attracts multitudes by the rewards of curiosity, and alienates them by the disappointment of baseless calculations. It calls many beneath its auspices, who wait in want till death for the anticipated benefactions. It presents a moral aspect, from its very incipency to the maturity of age, and established customs, tinged with every variety of character, and influenced by every grade and condition of life. Such a city is in all respects the child of the nation of which it is the capital. This may not be true of a commercial emporium; but it is true of this metropolis. Morally, Washington is at once the offspring and the representative of the entire confederacy, and it should be the child of prayers and liberal patronage throughout the nation; yet this does not excuse its citizens from the most direct and self-sacrificing local efforts. We cannot ask patronage abroad when we do not exert ourselves at home. Such was the conviction of the few devoted men who met on the 28th of March, 1848, in the lecture-room of the E street Baptist Church to consider the remedy for those evils in our midst which the Bible agent had revealed. To this meeting had been invited, by public notice, the ministers and members of all the evangelical churches of the city, many of which were represented by a zealous delegation of pastors and laymen. A society was organized,

denominated "The Washington City Union Missionary and Tract Society," by the adoption of a constitution, the fifth article of which was that "the management of this society shall be intrusted to an executive committee, composed of the president, secretary, and treasurer, and the pastors of the evangelical churches; five of whom shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business. They shall appoint their own chairman, and make their own laws." The object of the society was declared to be "to promote the cause of evangelical religion among the destitute in this city;" and, to accomplish this object, Mr. Wilson was appointed by the executive committee visiting agent. This society held its first public meeting in the F street Presbyterian Church on the 19th February, 1849. At this meeting the agent gave his first annual report, including some nine months' labor. He entered at once upon his mission after the organization of the society the March previous; he visited all parts of the city, especially those remote from places of public worship; and by distributing tracts, reading the Bible, prayer, and religious conversation, labored to impress upon individuals and families the sanctifying truth of the Gospel. In his first general report he says :

"I entered upon the work assigned me, going from family to family among the poor and destitute of the city, on Monday, April 3, 1848. I have from that time to the 1st of February, 1849, made 2,766 visits, engaged in prayer in these 990 times, distributed 3,805 tracts, containing 24,300 pages.

"It has been most gratifying and cheering to me to observe the very cordial manner in which I have been generally and almost universally received by the people. In all cases where circumstances permitted, I have, in the most personal and earnest manner, urged upon all the great concerns of their souls' salvation, beseeching and praying them in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God; and, relying alone upon Him, the good Spirit from on high has been present, making the truth reach the heart, evidenced by the tears coursing down the cheeks of many which no effort of theirs could stay or conceal, and accompanied frequently by their own expression of their sense of guilt and danger.

"I have not failed to employ my utmost efforts to fix upon the minds of all the vast importance to themselves and families of their becoming regular attendants upon some place of public worship, that from the mouth of God's servants, the living ministry, they might hear the great truths of his Gospel, the ordained instrumentality for salvation to all that believe. I have used my best efforts to induce parents to send their children regularly to some Sabbath school most convenient and agreeable to themselves, that they might have the privilege and advantage of enjoying the religious instruction which it is their aim and special object to communicate, and which, by the blessing of God, they have so successfully accomplished in the salvation of so many children and youth taught in them.

"On Friday evening, the 14th of April, I commenced a prayer meeting at the Glass House, visiting every family, and conversing and praying with them

on the day of the meeting. I soon felt that previous divine influences were resting upon and pervading the region, extending to almost every family in the neighborhood. The stillness and solemnity of the meeting equalled anything I had ever witnessed, though there were usually two or three mothers present, with their children in their arms.

"I soon invited those feeling themselves lost or ruined sinners, and determined now to seek the great salvation, to manifest it by rising or kneeling while a hymn was being sung. Two immediately arose, and on one occasion as many as eight. As the result in that neighborhood, sixteen have already united themselves with evangelical churches, all heads of families. In three cases both husbands and wives have joined themselves to Christ and his people in a spiritual union, which, if real, shall never be dissolved in time or eternity.

"The meeting on English Hill commenced the first Wednesday in July, and has been continued to this time. Soon the fiercest opposition was stirred up by an old woman, calling herself a Roman Catholic, who excited the half-grown boys to talk and be noisy about the door, and even to throw gravel against and into the house to disturb us. The man at whose house the meeting was held told me he was afraid to have it continued any longer, lest he should suffer injury. I told him not to fear; that *I could not think of letting the devil drive me off the ground while doing my Master's work*; that I would get a police officer to see that we were not disturbed or annoyed in our worship. I received the services of one who most faithfully and successfully performed his duty, so that the meeting soon assumed a stillness and, to a considerable extent, the solemnity that became the place of prayer. Soon a few of those attending seemed evidently awakened to a sense of their guilt and danger, and were prepared to ask what they must do to be saved. They were made special subjects of prayer; and in a few weeks they gave evidence that they had passed from death unto life. Two of them have united themselves with the Church of God, and others will no doubt soon follow their example. Four others, in different parts of the city, in connection with my labors, have also professed religion, making, in all, twenty-two that have already united themselves with evangelical churches. None of them, when first visited, were in the regular habit of attending any place of worship; some not having attended for three, five, six, and, in one case, even eight years.

"The number of individuals and families that have been induced by this means to become regular attendants upon the worship of God on the Sabbath I know to be large, but cannot state with certainty the precise number."

The executive committee have given most positive testimony to his usefulness. They testify, two years after the society was organized, as follows:

"With the evidences before them, the committee cannot hesitate in expressing the opinion that much real good has been effected through the labors of the agent. The instances alluded to are but a few, culled here and there from his monthly reports; and the reports themselves, abounding, as they do, in thrilling interest, are but selections from the indications of good which he meets with every month. There is every motive that can be derived both from faith and vision to urge the friends of the society to continued and renewed exertion.

From the seed sown, much fruit has been already gathered; the field is a most encouraging one, and proofs of its fruitfulness are constantly multiplying.

"If any doubt the usefulness of the society, and ask what are the evidences that it has as yet accomplished any substantial good, to such we say, go with us to one of the outskirts of the city, and we will show you there a house of worship which it has built, far from any other, and in which not less than twice a week the prayers of the children of God are mingled, and the voice of the ministry is heard; and then, if you can bear so long a walk, go with us to another remote section, and we will lead you to another building which it has erected, where also twice a week attentive congregations assemble for prayer, and to listen to the preaching of the Gospel; and if you can tarry there awhile, we will introduce you also to a flourishing Sabbath school, gathered through the same instrumentality. Besides this, if you will pass around on the Sabbath through the various churches and Sunday schools, and ask of many who have commenced attending only during the last year or two, "Who are these, and whence came they?" you will learn that they have been persuaded to attend through the means of this society; and if you will visit some of these churches at the solemn season of communion, you will behold, seated around the table of the Lord, a goodly number, who, until visited by the agent of this society, were strangers to the Saviour and to his people. Through the instrumentality of the society, thirty-four persons, nearly all of them heads of families, have united with different churches; four have died in the triumphs of faith, three of them before having had an opportunity to connect themselves with any church; and, in all, sixty-five have professed conversion.

"If you wish further evidence, and will accompany the agent in any of his daily tours, he will introduce you to numerous families who, though poor in this world's goods, are rich in hope of an inheritance in heaven; and you may hear among them the voice of prayer, mingled with thanksgiving for the institution of this society, and imploring blessings upon all its friends. He will point you, among other instances of equal interest, to a family whose head, a little while since, was an intemperate man, and so violent and abusive that his wife and children were compelled to leave him, but who now is a sober and industrious citizen, his family living together in harmony, and among whom confusion has given place to peace, and fear been driven away by love.

"If not yet satisfied, we will refer you to the people themselves, among whom the agent has visited, multitudes of whom will testify, in the emphatic language which one of them used a year ago, 'Sir, I see you are doing much good in the neighborhood, and I can and do heartily wish you success. I will give you all the encouragement I can.'

"If to all this you reply, 'But the field is a small one, and therefore but little can be done,' we answer (without stopping to prove so easy a proposition as that where religious influence is exerted no field can be small) that the good done by the society has already been carried beyond the limits of the corporation. A family moved into this city some time ago from Virginia, and was visited by the agent; while here, one of the members of the family gave good evidence of having experienced a change of heart, and when about to return to Virginia, said to the agent, 'I will employ my best efforts to get up a Sabbath school in the neighborhood where I am going,' and with tears in his eyes, and a melting heart, asked him to join with her to pray for her brothers and the un-

converted of her family. Who can limit religious influence, or stay its ever-widening circles? Who can say to it, thus far shalt thou go, and no farther; or mark out its metes and bounds?

“The agent has been faithful in the discharge of his duties. While the extent of his influence and his success are not to be measured by arithmetical computation, it may yet indicate his efficiency to state that, during the two years in which the society has been in existence, he has made more than five thousand visits, engaged in prayer in the families which he has visited nearly three thousand times, and distributed nearly seven thousand tracts, containing upwards of forty-four thousand pages. Among the persons whom he has visited, besides conversation and prayer, he has frequently read tracts and portions of scripture. He has often been sent for by individuals who were sick, and in many cases has been the means of obtaining for the poor needed assistance. He has not only himself attended the prayer meetings near the Glass House and on English Hill, but has every week taken pains to secure the attendance of brethren from different churches, ministers, and often choirs of young persons. He distributes the notices of the meetings of the executive committee, attend their sessions, and prepares for them every month a written report of his proceedings. The labors specifically assigned to him by the committee *he has voluntarily increased, and has toiled with an ardor and discretion of zeal which could have flowed only from love*, and which will doubtless receive from the society, as it has already done from the executive committee, the fullest approbation.”

Of this society he was the chief embodiment and efficiency till the 20th October, 1852, when, to meet the wants of those whom he found in his visits destitute of the word of God, he again enlisted as agent of the City Bible Society, canvassing the whole city as before described, and even exploring nearly the entire county of Washington. In the mean time his usefulness as a visiting agent and city missionary had been reported to the secretaries of the American Tract Society residing at New York, and they were interested to appoint him to carry on his work under their direction as a special visitor and agent of their society. His interest in the tract cause made the appointment very congenial to his wishes, and he gladly accepted it, entering without delay upon their service in a manner very similar to his former missionary work.

4. Of the results of his labors for the American Tract Society, much more should be said and written than can be at present. As when employed by the Union Missionary and Tract Society, he again went from family to family, with religious books and tracts, conversing and, so far as practicable, praying with the inmates of every dwelling. The chief object of the American Tract Society is to reach those individuals and families with religious truth who do not attend upon the public preaching of the Gospel, and are destitute of good religious reading.

This class of the American people is, as I have before stated, very

numerous in all our States and cities, and if churches and a living ministry are essential to sound morality, civil freedom, and genuine salvation, this colporteur work in some form is no less important or even essential. In thinly-populated regions, and in large or densely-crowded cities, this work cannot be too highly esteemed. It is a work particularly necessary in the District of Columbia, and Elder Wilson was eminently qualified to prosecute it thoroughly. His labors in this sphere were indeed more abundant than many could endure, and more blessed than many would dare anticipate. The officers of the society in New York were, in a measure, made aware of these facts by his statistical reports and other tokens of his eagerness to be useful. Personal interviews with the secretaries of the society before his death, and their communications since, assure me that he was not unappreciated, and that they felt grateful for the providences which secured to the general tract cause the services of so valuable a man. His facts also speak in unmistakable approval of his efficiency.

One of his statistical reports represents, in a concise tabular form, \$2,435 80 received for sales; \$190 worth of books and tracts given to the destitute; two hundred public meetings addressed, and prayer meetings held by himself; one thousand seven hundred and eighty-nine families destitute of all religious books except the Bible; five hundred and two families still found in the District of Columbia destitute of the Bible; one thousand six hundred and twenty-six habitually neglecting public evangelical worship; eight thousand five hundred and forty-six families visited; and six thousand five hundred and forty-five prayed with or fervently addressed on matters of personal religion. The incidents given in connection with his statistical reports, are, many of them, both thrilling and instructive, and indicate the earnestness and acceptance with which he preached Christ in the families which he visited. "The American Messenger" and "Child's Paper," the best periodicals of the kind published in the world, were often enriched by extracts from his concise and deeply pious sketches. Several of his reports and a few of his filial letters have been sent me by mail during the week, and it is really affecting to trace, in his own trembling handwriting, his diligence in this cause. "He went about doing good." "It was his meat and drink to do the will of Him that sent him." How many families were visited in a year, and made better for his presence? How much more beautiful to him was the image of Christ reflected from the spirit of the Christian, clothed with divine righteousness, than regular features and costly apparel! How much brighter to his eye were tears of penitence than costly gems or night's best shower of stars. Repentant tears were, to him, like the first dews of morning—

like the light of heaven darting in through "the door of hope," and portraying, in the dark prison-walls of depraved hearts, the inverted images of glory. He was comforted by penitential sorrow, for he knew "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit," and used often to say with assurance, "A broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." He may have been *too* hopeful; if so, it was a good fault, for which no man might chide him. His own sketches indicate great hopefulness, sincerity, frankness, and *faithfulness*. He was often very forcibly and convincing in his personal appeals. A few of the incidents recorded in his reports before the three societies already named should not be omitted here. They will reveal his spirit as a family visitor, and his success in reaching the hardest hearts.

When laboring for the City Bible Society, among a multitude of interesting sketches reported I find an interview with a sick man nigh unto death, who had beside him on his couch a Bible which Mr. Wilson had furnished him six years before, and which, with the earnest entreaties made at the time the Bible was given, had been to him "the law that is perfect, converting the soul." The sacred present had become a bright light in "the dark valley," and the agent who, six years before had visited him in time to give him the effectual warning, had now called again in time to record his dying testimony of hope and faith. Another visit to the sick is recorded in the same report, in which the sufferer was an aged colored woman, who was unable to read, and had no Bible, but was attended by her sister, who could read, and who had endeavored to procure a Testament, but was in such utter destitution as to render it impossible for her to pay for one in large type such as she needed. Mr. Wilson gave them a Bible, heard them read from it, and then urged them to an immediate preparation to meet God, and described to them the character and mission of Christ, as himself "the way, the truth, and the life." The heart-felt gratitude which they expressed for such "glad tidings" was enough to shed light upon the agent's path for many days.

I will quote from his own pen a few incidents, which will show his fidelity to all classes, and illustrate his mode of personal effort.

"In a house neatly furnished I asked the lady, herself richly attired, if she had a Bible. She said, 'No, indeed! and I do not want any!' She further said she was of no denomination, and attended no church. I offered to give her a Bible: she thanked me and said, if she wanted one, she was able to buy it and pay for it. I asked her the cause of her hostility to the Bible. She replied, 'There are so many hypocritical professors of religion that I want nothing to do with it in any form.' She illustrated what she meant by referring to her husband's mother,

as having induced him to expend for her luxury what belonged strictly to his wife. I told her that what she had stated, and her present unhappy feelings, were proof that she needed the power of the Gospel before she could be peaceful in spirit—that God's testimony is, 'there is no peace to the wicked, who are like the troubled sea which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.' I asked her if she did not find it true in her own experience? She said, 'Yes; I am far from being happy.' I answered, 'So it will be with you so long as you seek happiness in the world. The very friendship of the world is enmity with God.' I then urged her to seek peace by repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ—laying up better treasures than earth can give in heaven, at God's right hand, where are pleasures for evermore; and assuring her that where her treasure is, there her heart must be also. As I left, she expressed deep gratitude for the interest in her which I had manifested."

"Another, a German rationalist, whom I asked if he had a Bible, said he had none, and did not believe in it; that he knew enough of it, having been taught it in the schools in Germany, and proved it to be false in several parts of it. I told him the difficulty was not in the Bible, but in the depravity and wickedness of his own spirit, as the Bible truly testifies, 'the carnal heart is enmity against God, deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.' After further conversation, he admitted the Bible contains the purest morals known among men. I asked him how that could be, if, as he said, it taught falsehood. He stood embarrassed for an answer, when I told him I would leave him to settle the matter with his own heart, with a prayer in his behalf that the Lord would open his mind and heart to see, believe, and know the truth as it is in Jesus."

"I entered a house in which I found three Irish women. They said they had no Bible; that they were Roman Catholics, and did not need any; that they had their prayer-book, and such books as the church directed to be used. I opened my bundle, and offered to supply them with a Bible. They replied, No; they wanted none of my Protestant books in their house. One of them left the room and went up stairs, and invited down a rough looking man, and then passing by me locked the front door. He stood in the door leading to the other part of the house, and, with angry countenance, said, 'How can you engage in such nefarious business as circulating a false version of the Bible?' I told him I had the true and best Bible in existence. He said, 'The circulation of the Protestant Bible has caused more angry feelings and bloodshed than all other causes.' I replied, the Romish Church fears the Bible, and tries to conceal and keep it from the people,

lest they become too enlightened to submit to her penances, confessionals, and oppressions, and has literally deluged the earth with the blood of the saints; that while we are talking, there are men and women incarcerated in loathsome prisons in Italy, subject to execution for no other offence but reading the Word of the living God, which he has given to make wise unto salvation and to make us free indeed. Finding me still unintimidated and faithful to tell him the truth, he asked me, in a calmer tone, how I knew this was the Word of God. I answered, I know it from the perfect portraiture which it exhibits of the secret workings and corruptions of the soul, such as none but the omniscient God could develop, and I know from the fulfilment of prophecy that it is the record of Him who knoweth all things from the beginning. I then read the 53d chapter of Isaiah. He took a seat and listened to it, and I asked him to whom he thought that referred. He said, 'Evidently to the Lord Jesus Christ.' I replied, in conclusion, that in Him is fulfilled all the law and the prophets, and He is the end of the law for righteousness to all that believe on Him. Having presented to them thus the doctrine of the supremacy of God's Word and salvation by faith, I bade them an affectionate farewell and departed."

"In another family I asked the woman of the house if she had a Bible. A Bible! said she; she did not know what I meant. I showed her one; and she said she never had anything like it. A lady present said, in explanation, 'We are Roman Catholics and do not need or use the Bible; and would not be allowed to have it if we wanted it ever so much.' I told them it was wicked to allow themselves to be robbed of the bread of life; that God would hold them individually accountable for their treatment of Him and His Word, given to teach them the way of eternal life; that God had given the Bible to us as our birthright; that the Saviour commanded them to 'search the Scriptures,' and that the Apostle commended the Bereans for searching the Scriptures, and that all true successors of the Apostles would do the same. I told them I would like to leave the Word of God with them, that they might see for themselves what it contained. They said they would surely read it if I would leave it, and take care of it till I should come again. I left them both reading the Bible, and offered a silent prayer that God would attend it with His blessing and make it the wisdom of God and the power of God to their salvation."

"In one house I found a man sick with the consumption. He said, in answer to the inquiry if he was a Christian, 'in myself I am nothing, but on Christ I rely for salvation. I trust in Him as able and willing to save all that come to God by him.' After praying with him, he asked my name, and said he was glad to see me to tell me of the happy

influence of a Bible which I gave to his lame brother five years previous. He said, the conversation and prayer I had with him made an impression upon his mind, and he gradually became deeply interested in his Bible till it was his constant companion. He said, he had witnessed often the comfort it afforded him in his affliction, and beheld his ultimate peaceful death." "A widowed mother, with four little children to support, said she was almost ashamed to tell me she had no Bible; that she would gladly buy one, but she had no money. I handed her one, and told her, as agent of the Washington Bible Society, I was authorized to give it to her. She seemed truly grateful for it, and I asked her if she had seriously attended to her salvation. She replied, she had not. I sought to hold up to her view the nature of her guilt and danger as a sinner condemned already and the wrath of God abiding on her, and the vast importance to herself and children of giving immediately her best energies to secure eternal life by embracing Jesus Christ as her Saviour. She seemed much interested in the words which I spoke and read. We knelt in prayer that God's Spirit might open her heart to receive the truth. Six or eight days after, when passing near her residence, another woman came calling after me and said she had inquired of several to find where I lived; for a lady to whom I had given a Bible was very ill and wished much to see me. I went immediately to see her and found her dangerously ill with lung fever, but much alive to her guilty condition. She said she felt her sins burdening her, and knew not what to do. I pointed to Christ as able to save to the uttermost all who come to God by Him; as having borne her sins and carried her sorrows, and now saying 'Come unto me.' These and other similar truths seemed to calm her troubled spirit. She asked me to pray for her, which I did with all my heart. Before I left, she said she felt peace in believing in Jesus. I visited her many times after that, and always found her submissive to the divine will and at peace, ever glad to see me, and seeming literally to drink in the truth which I was kindly permitted to bear to her."

These extracts from his notes as Bible agent indicate his fitness to be a blessing to all classes in all circumstances. The incidents found in his memoranda as city missionary are more interesting in their detail than those already repeated; but the extracts given, when speaking of that department of his labor, and the large number of incidents from which to select a few as illustrative of his labors in the American tract cause, compel me to omit all his personal sketches when visiting for the Union Missionary Society.

As colporteur of the American Tract Society, he recorded many faithful interviews and acknowledged much fruit for his faithfulness. He

says: "On one occasion a Sabbath-school teacher told me that two of his class were first interested and awakened by reading the 'Scripture Biography' and 'Repository of Tracts' which I had furnished them, and were recently admitted to church-fellowship with himself." "A colored man told me that 'Romaine's Life of Faith' had given him much light on that difficult subject; that he had read it many times, and that he was striving to live by faith in the Son of God and to bring forth fruits of piety."

"Four or five months since I visited a family composed of father, mother, and son. As I did not succeed in selling any of my books, I gave them some tracts and talked and prayed with them. A few days afterwards the young man hailed me in the street, saying they had been so much interested in the tracts that he wished to get something else of me. He purchased Pike's Persuasives to Early Piety, and Baxter's Saints' Rest. Some days after the family removed to the country, and I did not see any of them until two weeks since, when the son came up to me with every expression of pleasure and joy, shook me warmly by the hand, and began to tell what the Lord had done for him. He said, 'Serious impressions were first made upon my mind by reading the tracts, and these impressions were matured by reading the books which I got from you, and my father, mother, and myself were led by them to the foot of the cross, where we found joy and peace in believing in Jesus: we are now members of an evangelical church near our home.'"

"A gentleman who purchased James' Anxious Inquirer, Sabbath Manual, &c., says: 'The reading of those books has entirely revolutionized the state of things in my family. Before that, none cared much for the Sabbath, church, or anything of the sort; but now all that can attend church and esteem it a pleasant service, and two of us are so much interested in religious things that we shall soon join the people of God.' I asked which of his family were particularly interested and weighing the subject of church-membership. He replied, 'Myself and my eldest daughter, and I hope there are others that will not tarry long behind.'"

"In my visits I met a young man from the country, and prevailed upon him to purchase Baxter's Call and Harlan Page. Some time after I saw him again, when he met me with so much pleasure and joy upon his countenance that I was sure he had some good tidings to communicate. As soon as he could give expression to his feelings—for they seemed too big for utterance—he said, 'The books I purchased of you have been richly blessed to me, by arousing me to a sense of my lost condition as a sinner. For several days I was much burdened and distressed on account of my sins, but I continued to read and to pray till light broke in upon

my spirit. Since then I have been peaceful and happy. My mother and sister here are also much interested in reading them, and are now seriously impressed. I wish to express my gratitude to you for having brought such a treasure to me.' He bought several other books—Doddridge, Flavel, &c.—saying he expected they would continue to do good in his neighborhood."

"Some time since I gave a youth of sixteen or seventeen years of age the tract entitled 'Come to Jesus,' which he took home. He read it with such deep emotion as to be noticed by the other members of the family. From that time there was a marked change in him. He then began to attend one of the evangelical churches in the city, and was a regular attendant at the Sabbath school, until prevented by sickness. His sickness terminated fatally in five weeks, but not until the spirit of faith, wrought in his heart by God's blessing upon the tract, had been developed. He repeated many times, he was not afraid to die; that he believed and trusted in Jesus as his only Saviour, and expressed much thankfulness that God had directed me to him. Just before he breathed his last, he made a most earnest and touching appeal to his sorrowing friends, urging them to prepare to meet him in heaven."

"A woman with a blind husband told me I could never know in this world how much good I had done them by my weekly visits with tracts and spiritual counsel, which had been blessed in bringing them to behold wondrous things out of God's law, and leading them from their spiritual blindness into the marvellous light of the Gospel." "An aged man said, 'For seventy years I have been neglecting and even scoffing at religion, but God in His great compassion has shown me my condition as a sinner when reading 'The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain.' Now he is a joyful Christian.'" "I presented a young man from the country the little volume 'Young Man from Home.' He recently met me and said the volume was exactly suited to his state of mind; it so fully exposed his imminent dangers that he regarded it as a kind messenger sent from his Father in heaven to prevent his ruin. These impressions led him to the house of God, where the way of salvation was more clearly opened before him, and he was led to devote himself and all that he had to the service of Christ his Saviour." "Twenty-three persons professing conversion have communicated the fact that their first serious impressions were made by the silent messages of truth furnished in my visits to them. How many others may have been blessed in the same brief period and by the same instrumentalities eternity only can disclose." "I am thus constantly in part receiving the fruit of my labors; and though at times feeble in my bodily frame, my heart is rejoiced and strengthened in this good work."

I must not multiply incidents recorded by his own trembling hand in these reports. Two full chapters at least might be given to facts of the most interesting character had we time; but I must pass to notice—

5. His labors in the Sunday-school cause: And here the record is also too full, and it is to a large extent sealed up until the time of the end. Those added to the churches with which he has been associated have in many instances attributed their first serious impression to the kindness of his entreaties, the tangible nature of his piety, and the earnestness of his prayers as a superintendent of Sabbath schools.

In the first of his association with the Christian church, he evinced a fondness for the young persons in the congregation, which met a response from the hearts of parents and children. Parents love the man who loves their children and is willing to exert himself for their welfare; the children also loved him because he first loved them. These facts, connected with his ardent and inevitable punctuality, fitted him at once to superintend the Sabbath school of the church in which he was an elder, and he was appointed to aid in this work in 1823, when connected with the Second Presbyterian Church, and continued an active and acceptable superintendent of schools until his decease. His influence in shaping and sustaining the Sabbath School Union of this city is familiar to the minds of all who have seen the tall slender frame and benign features of the man as he marshaled the juvenile forces at annual meetings, and moved about a master spirit among them. His presence was always a token for good—his absence was a marvel.

In regard to his fitness for this work, and the past usefulness of his ministry to the young, one of his former pastors, who is now in a distant land, said to me more than a year since, "He is a most indefatigable man in his labors for the children of the congregation; and the result is, many are *converted* in the Sabbath school, and others received the impressions which make them the ready subjects of revivals. Probably more persons were brought into the Fourth Presbyterian Church in this way than by the influence of any other one man."

Elder Wilson was for many years the life and soul of very important schools in this city. One intimately associated with him in his early labors of love in Washington, writes me as follows:

"He was, as all know, a devoted friend of the Sunday-school cause. With few advantages of early education, and little *critical* acquaintance with the Scriptures, he made, nevertheless, an impressive and profitable teacher, dealing as he always did in the vital, fundamental truths of the Christian system, and watering as he did all his teaching with prayer, he succeeded in making a strong impression on the minds of the young. Then he was constitutionally and habitually *punctual*. His watch

was always in his hand: whoever was behind the appointed hour, he was not."

"Brought up in the country, he had the habit of early rising; and this helped to make him a great friend to early prayer-meetings. A prayer-meeting at sunrise was one of the measures which marked the rise of the Fourth Church. I could relate instances of the open, obvious, undeniable, and immediate answers to prayer there offered which would surprise Christians, and which to worldly men or lukewarm professors would be altogether incredible. I trembled while I beheld. O, that it were so always!"

6. This leads me to speak of his experience as a praying man and his efforts to originate and sustain prayer-meetings, some of which resulted in the organization of Sunday schools and churches.

While a member of the Second Church, and then of the Fourth, and finally of the Western Church, he was a man distinguished for his importunity, perseverance, and prevalence in prayer. In seasons of revival or great spiritual declension, he was often in an agony of prayer, which would accompany him for days and detain him from both food and sleep. He was known at different times to spend the whole night in earnest supplication. The general interests of the church and the special necessities of individuals with whom he had conversed, were ever upon his heart, and he prayed for general and particular objects, knowing what blessings he wanted, and for whose sake he desired them. The honor of Christ, through whose name and merits all blessings flow to men, furnished a sufficient argument for him before the mercy-seat. His public prayers were usually brief, but in social and secret worship he often lingered by the hour around the throne till he could touch the divine sceptre and move the arm that swayed it. He prayed not as if his prayers were meritorious, and would lay God under obligation to any of His creatures; but he prayed because his soul longed to have what God loves to give—prayer being, in his esteem, a going up toward God for the blessings which He is bowing the gentle heavens to offer. God had manifestly raised in Elder Wilson's spirit the cry for many of the richest blessings which he ever bestowed upon our citizens or our country. His patriotism was inferior only to his piety; and his idea of a Christian nation, consecrated to God from its Capital to its circumference, was only surpassed by his certain hope, that the kingdom of Christ shall yet fill the earth. He was an humble, loyal citizen, and his patriotism was not that of the partisan or the politician: it was more like that of Jesus and Jeremiah as they wept over Jerusalem, and of Abraham when he claimed the promised land, and offered his son within the bounds of its future capital, and upon the site of its future magnificent

temple. His heart was large, and grasped with warm desire the interests of this land given by God to our fathers: his sympathy was deep, and reached to the lowest sons of want, and estimated them by what they cost the Son of God, and what they would become if sanctified through the truth. No immortal being was, therefore, esteemed lightly, or beneath his prayers and efforts.

Among the first of his labors to establish prayer-meetings, was the effort in 1823 to extend the influences of religion among the neglected colored people of Washington, who were then in a very destitute condition, temporally and morally. He appointed a meeting at a private house on G street, between twelfth and thirteenth streets. All the inmates of the house were then impenitent, and there were few pious persons at first to attend his appointment. It is supposed to have been the first prayer-meeting of the kind ever held in Washington, and its utility was indeed a problem. A gentlemen, addressing the monthly concert of the Sabbath School Union many years afterwards, described the first three meetings in these plain terms: "The first meeting," said he, "was thinly attended; the second, all up and down stairs was full of black faces; and the third, in doors and all out of doors was one black cloud reaching far back."

Every person can see that this was one of the most hazardous undertakings at that time, and most difficult to manage, and of most doubtful promise; but to cultivate piety, and awaken an enlightened sense of accountability to God and man among these colored people, who were the moving monuments of the declaration, "No man hath cared for my soul," was to him a work of sufficient importance to authorize some risk. He felt called of God to make trial of the matter, and by his prudence and perseverance, under the divine blessing, the meetings thus commenced, by their restrained and well-timed influence, in connection with a Sabbath school, (which he originated and conducted at the same time on H and fourteenth streets,) resulted in the most useful and orderly colored church in this city, whose neat brick edifice is seen on Fifteenth street. The late and very worthy pastor of that church, Rev. J. F. Cook, was converted through his instrumentality, when in his school and a member of his Bible class. Soon after this Mr. Wilson was active in supporting a Union Sabbath prayer-meeting, in which all the evangelical denominations of Washington were represented. This meeting had much to do in bringing about that happy spirit of harmony which has rendered evangelical associations of the city so happy and efficient in their co-operations. Next is that morning prayer-meeting before mentioned, which so signalized the infancy of the Fourth Church, and a Congressional prayer-meeting, in which the

humble, unpretending layman and the honorable, high-minded statesman knelt side by side, and followed each the other to the throne of grace. And finally, besides the meetings and Sunday schools which he established on the "Island" and English Hill, should be mentioned the meeting near the "Glass House," and the small meeting-house which resulted from it, on the corner of E and twenty-second streets, which became the birthplace of the Western Presbyterian Church. [Other gentlemen co-operated with him in all these labors, nobly; and when they are also dead, what they did should be told as memorials of them: the names of no *living* men shall appear in this discourse, except as witnesses.] Elder David M. Wilson was the legitimate father of this church, and I thank God he was not away from home when he died!

Concerning his influence in the origin and training of the Fourth Church, several truly touching paragraphs have been addressed to me during the week. One extract from the lay testimony will suffice to show the high esteem in which he was held by the early founders of that church. A person who was from the first of that organization associated with Mr. Wilson, writes—"I cannot do justice to the vehemence and activity with which he labored in that new enterprise. He beat up for recruits everywhere, entering into the lanes and outskirts of the city, and gathering strangers from every quarter. His pastor had no lack of hearers, and in a little time no lack of converts; and thus, under a marvellous blessing from heaven, arose as from nothing that great interest known as the Fourth Presbyterian Church."

This testimony of laymen is fully approved by the first and second pastors of that church. Rev. Mason Noble, for years his affectionate minister, said to me a few weeks before he left for the Mediterranean, and I noted his words, "I congratulate you upon having so heavenly-minded and so efficient an elder in your church. I know him well, and he is the truest man I ever knew. Whatever God has put into his heart to do, he will do; nothing will deter him from giving to his pastor the spiritual counsel which his office requires, just as it in his own sincere and forgiving spirit. His name, experience, and power with God in prayer, eminently fit him to be the spiritual adviser and companion of a young minister. Indeed, I know no man on whose co-operation I could rely with more confidence."

Rev. Dr. J. N. Danforth, the first pastor of the Fourth Church, has given already his full and affectionate remembrance of Elder Wilson to the public. You have read it. He says: "The memory of Mr. Wilson needs no eulogy from me. His regenerate life was one long scene, I may almost say the *agony*, of industrious effort for the salvation of sinners. He had a *passion* for individual conversions. Sacred, inextin-

guishable, fed at the fountain of infinite love, it impelled him to incessant and untiring efforts for the conversion of men. When, in the year 1828, the Fourth Presbyterian Church was founded, all eyes were turned to him as the most suitable person to fill the office of its first elder. If there be any act of my ministerial life on which I can reflect with unalloyed pleasure, it is that in which I laid the hand of ordination on the head of this devoted man, and set him apart with prayer to the great Head of the Church.* Well and faithfully from that hour did he discharge the duties of his high office. Now with the pastor, now with the sick, with the Sabbath school, or ministering to the afflicted, or seeking out the wandering, or finding the anxious, or rejoicing with the converted—and in all glorifying God. His life was a sustained enthusiasm of the most earnest and practical character. Nothing turned him aside from its grand object—the conversion of sinners. Probably few ministers have been the means of saving so many souls by direct personal effort with individuals.”

But I must stop taking testimony concerning his life. Ye all are his witnesses how unblamably he lived among you ; and ye know how he exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto His kingdom and glory. (1 Thess., 2 chap.)

As he had been a blessed instrument in the germination of the First Colored Church, and in the origin and full development of the Fourth Church, so had he planted the germ of this Western Church, and watched it with an assiduity equalled only by his faith and hope. He regarded this church enterprise as the child of his prayers and co-operations when conducting the meetings near the “Glass House,” and esteemed it the climax of his usefulness.

It is fit that the memorial of his life shall be fully given from the place where he enacted the best, the closing chapter. All that has been testified concerning him in other enterprises as a devoted, a “perfect and upright man,” was fully verified the last year of his life. He was received as Elder of the Western Presbyterian Church January 13, 1855, and elected superintendent of the Sabbath school the following Sabbath. Notwithstanding his other labors, no man could have been more faithful, more instant in season, more acceptable, more be-

* It is worthy of remark, that that ordination, on which the divine approbation rested, was done without any consultation of Presbytery, and by one not then a pastor or member of the Presbytery of the District of Columbia, but by one, nevertheless, who has been affectionately devoted to the Presbyterian Church.

loved. He became connected with the church when we worshipped in the small wooden house in the outskirts of the city, when the financial part of the enterprise, which had been so successfully launched, was run aground in a most severe monetary crisis, with a debt of thousands pressing upon it, and every known resource apparently exhausted. He lived to see the debts of the building committee as nearly paid up as they should be, it is believed, till the contract is completed; the church, at first numbering twenty-four, nearly doubled in its members; the congregation in this foretaste of the upper sanctuary, which will advance to completion as fast as the means are subscribed or the money invested, and the builder is willing to advance with it; and he lived to enjoy regularly for months this sacred platform as his place for secret prayer. As when he was employed at the Capitol he had his consecrated spot where he always prayed at midnight, so during his association with this house of worship, he used every morning, till after the opening of winter, to come here in solitude to pray. The key kept at his residence was always missing after breakfast, and here he opened the official labors of each day with secret prayer. Yes, my brethren, he lived to bear his last testimony around the table of his Lord, where he had first beheld His divine glory. He asked confidently and with deep emotion the privilege of lay exhortation at the close of the last solemn feast which he celebrated here. It was granted promptly, fearing as I did that he might not be again with us. He made the closing appeal to the impenitent. It was affectionate, impressive: it was to several families here his last appeal. May it be the last you need, my friends, to win you to his footsteps.

7. His last engagement as agent of any society was made with the managers of the "Union Benevolent Society," organized for the relief of the poor—an engagement perfected but a few days before the communion Sabbath just described.

His day of life was nearly ended, and his efforts for this society were the last and well-timed efforts of the working man, as he gives his finishing strokes before retiring with his coat and sickle and his loaded sheaves in triumph from the field. At certain times he received and collected subscriptions for the society; during given hours of each day he tarried at the society rooms to receive applications for food or fuel; and the rest of his time, some of which he should have spent in repose, he employed in seeking out the poor, investigating the merit of their appeals, and procuring and directing supplies. This was work which none understood better than Mr. Wilson, and yet a responsibility which required a man of giant frame and iron nerves—one who could bear exertion without fatigue, and excitement without anxiety. Mr. Wil-

son's sensibility was too acute, and his fund of vitality too near exhausted with life-long exertions, to bear the sight of human want in fierce succession, daily, hourly, and to tread unwonted depths of snow, and face unheard of blasts of winter, in his efforts to alleviate suffering and loosen the grasp of utter destitution. It was too much: he fell a martyr to his own pity for the poor and sympathy with the suffering. He laid himself on the altar of suffering humanity, and his own sanctified sympathy held the sacrificial knife and fire, and he died a free-will offering for the destitute and the degraded in this the Capital of the United States. "In vain did we urge him, amid the inclemency of the winter, to rest his wearied frame, and give nature and nursing an opportunity to resist threatening disease. He *must* work, and did work till he could stand up no longer; and on the last day of the past memorable winter yielded his breath to God! After being thus assured how he *lived*, we scarcely need to ask how he *died*!" Yet he who teaches others how to live, is best qualified to teach us also how to die.

II. Let us, then, consider, for a moment, the *death* of such a man: *his* death—for he is indeed dead! and his death may be a wise teacher. See him in his closing conflict, and mark the final triumph.

"Let not opinion make your judgment err,
It is the *evening* conquest crowns the conqueror."

His physician, qualified by medical skill and experience, by ardent piety and the deepest *filial affection*, to minister to him in his last sickness, gives the following account of the disease which terminated his life: "Mr. Wilson was attacked, about six weeks before his death, with a violent ulceration of the throat, contracted while in the discharge of his duties as agent of the 'Union Benevolent Society,' for the relief of the poor of Washington. Though suffering severely, he was unwilling to give up attending to the wants of the needy, and continued his efforts through the severest of the severe winter, until about three weeks before he died. The disease then assumed a typhoid character, indicated by great prostration of the system; and such was the intensity of the disease that he was unable to swallow anything but the mildest liquids. The more immediate cause of his death was the extension of the disease to the air passages and lungs, constituting *inflammation of the lungs, or typhoid pneumonia*." He died on the morning of the 29th of February, the last morn of winter, and passed to that region of perennial spring where he had often seen

"Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood
Stand dressed in living green."

We look to those scenes, or try to behold them :

“The wide, unbounded prospect lies before us ;
But shadows, clouds, and darkness rest upon it.”

The parting veil was lifted before *him* in his last sickness, so that he saw clearly. Perhaps, if we go to his death-bed, we may, as the parting veil rises, catch some glimpses of eternal things.

Approach the scene, reverently and in silence :

“The chamber where the good man meets his end
Is privileged beyond the common walks
Of virtuous life—quite *in the verge of heaven!*”

Thus seemed his death-chamber. It was my privilege to be often with him there. Though unable to use freely his vocal organs, and not at all without increased pain, still he loved religious conversation. His vision was clear and his sky unclouded. His path had been shining more and more unto the perfect day, and the meridian sunshine of heaven was, even in his agony, all beautiful before him in attractive glory. A friend who had called to comfort him expressed in his prayer the wish that God would remove all *doubts* from his mind, and the *clouds* which separated between him and heaven. As he arose, Mr. Wilson said to him, “There are no clouds in my religion; doubts have been all banished from my mind.” “The time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith; and I *know* there is a crown of righteousness laid up for me, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me at that day.” At another time, one was telling him of death-bed scenes where he hoped he had been instrumental in bringing impenitent persons to death-bed repentance and joy. Said he, after listening for some time, “My brother, I had rather have a hope followed by a life of piety and walking with God, than all the *conceivable* paroxysms of joy flowing from death-bed repentance. Let the life be right, by a *living experience*, and the Good Shepherd will take care of the dark valley.”

During all his sickness, prayer, which had so long been his “vital breath” and “native air,” was his sweetest luxury. I could seldom enter his room without his uttering his spontaneous expression, “Have a word of prayer with me!” He literally “entered heaven with prayer.” Although his own future was bright, and nothing dubious lingering about it, he was not free from anxiety at times for the living. He talked freely and cheerfully of the exemplary and prayerful walk of the members generally of this church, and unbosomed himself completely concerning the necessity of strict discipline with the mature

who are erring, and claimed that the purity of a church should be regarded as the measure of its strength. Aware of his own hopeful and forgiving spirit, he seemed to indulge a latent fear, that as a Ruling Elder he *had* inclined more to the side of mercy to the erring than was well for the integrity of the Church of Christ. His views expressed to me on this subject during his last sickness will shed much light on my future course. The testimony of such a man at such a time, looking back upon such a life of spiritual responsibility, and forward to such a heaven of purity, is valuable indeed. His feeling was that the Church of Christ should be spotless and without a just reproach. The unfaithfulness of Christians was a thorn in his dying pillow. Another trial was that he should be called to heaven without the intelligence that some in this congregation for whom he had long prayed had repented. This was even more painful than the thought of leaving his wife a widow and his children fatherless. God had promised to be the God of the widow, and of the fatherless a Father; but from the necessity of His own nature and equity, which is inevitable, He must be "a consuming fire" to those who continue "out of Christ." In these anxieties his bright visions of the future strengthened him. One time he exclaimed, in broken accents, "O, the imagery!—the bright imagery!" The night before he died, I asked him if the Saviour seemed precious to him, and if he could lean upon Him confidently as ever. He replied, "O, yes; He does not forsake me!" and then added, with difficulty, "While I have been detained from the public sanctuary, I have had sweet communion here with Him and His people." I asked him how the future seemed—whether he could see any bright lights in the heavenly landing? He said, "Yes, indeed! God is my light! My God is all light!" I then asked him if he had any message for the brethren in the prayer-meeting, to which I was about to repair. He made great effort to speak, but at first articulated so indistinctly that I could not catch his words; but his closing sentence he uttered distinctly and with emphasis. Said he, "Tell them to think more of the *realities* of eternity!" These were the last words I heard him utter the night he died. The last word he spoke audibly to any one was the name of his youngest son, as if to say, "Son, behold thy mother!" or to leave his parting blessing with the one whom he bequeathed to this infant church of God.

See the dying man! See him!—already fording the river of death! Speak to him!—louder!—he scarcely hears you! Call for his last words. Hark!—hear them, as they echo from the bright hills on the other side of death!—"MY GOD IS ALL LIGHT! THINK MORE OF THE REALITIES OF ETERNITY!"

"Our souls much farther than our eyes can see," and in the pursuit of *him*, *our* spirits seem almost departed. He is now invisible—he is over—and these his last words come to us like the echo of his footsteps as he walks the golden streets and enters that upper temple! Call him not back! *Wish* him not back! nor "tarry long gazing up into heaven!" His death as well as his life is our teacher.

III. What are the special lessons taught by his life and death? Such a character, developed before you by such a life and crowned by such an end, stands up like a monumental shaft, inscribed all over with lessons of wisdom.

1. He teaches that youthful extravagance is dangerous. He reached the verge of ruin himself, and came near passing it.

2. He teaches the worth of family religion and its power to save the young; its effects upon himself and afterwards upon his own family are illustrations.

3. He teaches the worth of a *good name*; not simply the *untarnished* name which he inherited from his ancestors, but that which he won by his integrity. To be a man of "good report" is better than to be a man of wealth without right. "A name truly good is the aroma from virtuous character; it is such a name as is remembered not only on earth but in heaven." Its possession is wealth of the most sacred value, and it were easier to recover from utter financial bankruptcy with five thousand customers after you to snatch each hard-earned dollar, than to extricate one's self from bankruptcy of name and reputation. Let the young man—let all be careful never to defraud confidence. If you do in any case barter away your good name for any virtue, remember it is a jewel easier tarnished, lost, than brightened or restored. No person who has not this jewel—a good name—should ever be considered eligible to the sacred offices which he filled.

4. He teaches the importance of venerating usefulness, and regarding as a sacred thing the reputation of those appointed to responsible offices among men, and especially in the Christian church. His lips were never opened to give utterance to slander, and any act intended to defame the virtuous and retard the usefulness of consecrated men was to him a dastardly and cruel act, which he felt must be rebuked of God.

5. He taught the worth of simplicity of character. He was guileless and confiding, and that was noble. Happy is the man who is sure he can trust somebody; and happy is the youth who has yet learned to distrust nobody. The man is neither happy nor trustworthy whose mind is ever on the lookout for tokens of treachery among his peers,

and is most active to discover reasons for *withholding* confidence. Such a man will not be trusted—should not be. His chief study is to resolve the dark spots upon human nature, until he sees them first on every character, and thinks there is not one to trust, not even in Christendom. He analyzes vice rather than virtue, treachery rather than truthfulness, till treachery is his chief companion. He sets, a sly embodiment of sagacity on his brow, laughs in his heart at the spotless simplicity of the unsophisticated youth and the virtuous unsuspecting man; but, unhappy, self-conceited, the eye of practised virtue is on him betimes, and reads him through and through, and pronounces him at once a miserable, self-complacent fraction of a man, bearing on his deathless soul Satan's image and superscription!

How different such a character from the guileless, unsuspecting, and yet, in a peculiar sense, discriminating Elder Wilson? Himself above suspicion, he had nothing of the suspicious or deceptive in his nature. This does not imply that a man should reveal everything, having nothing to keep sacred. Transparency of character is not a mirror from which flash the faults and scandals of other men; nor a lens through which the rapacious may gaze upon all the treasures of God's inmost temple. The Saviour, in whose lips there was no guile, escaped from the Jews *incognito* when they sought to stone him, before his hour was come; and yet his character was the model of perfect sincerity and simplicity. He, as is every noble character, was frank, guileless, and confiding; and in these respects Mr. Wilson was unusually Christlike.

6. He commends all the evangelical movements of the day to our sympathy and support.

7. He suggests many things which are very important for Sabbath school teachers; such as the dignity of their calling, the importance and power of faith, the necessity of prayer, punctuality, and a due sense of the worth of souls.

8. He suggests many things to the officers of the church. We are reminded at once that he is no more of our number. He is now a "king and a priest unto God in the general assembly and church of the first born," and will no more return to aid us at the communion table, or to appear in Presbytery. He attended the last meeting of the Presbytery of the District of Columbia before his death in this house; and though at the time his energies were prostrated by disease, he represented, in his usual nervous and decided manner, the interests of this church and Sabbath school. He attended also the last meeting of the Synod of Virginia, sat on the same seat in a part of his journey with our deceased brother in the ministry, Rev. J. J. Royal. They were devoted to each other more tenderly than those who are merely kinsmen according to

the flesh; and the first sentence brother Royal ever addressed to me was concerning the power which Elder Wilson seemed to have with God during the revivals in the Fourth Church, in which he had been called to be the assisting minister, and Mr. Wilson one of those to stay up his hands by prayer and personal effort. Mr. Wilson appeared in Synod, nominated the moderator of Synod, faithfully and earnestly represented the condition and claims of the church of which he was the Ruling Elder, and in his personal intercourse while there won greatly upon the affection of those with whom he associated. His course was venerated by his pastor, who watched every movement as that of a servant of God, who was ripe for heaven and might soon be gathered home. His life and character were ever before me, and full of instruction. My brethren, in the official relations of the kingdom of Christ, his character, his life and death, are to us very suggestive; and because they are so instructive, we feel more keenly our loss. Mr. Wilson was a rare spiritual counsellor. He was almost a teaching and apostolic elder, and had many excellencies, to imitate which would be worthy of our emulation. Remember, too, my Christian friends, as he left us when we most needed him, so you may be called hence when your associates are least ready to spare you, and when you least anticipate your summons.

9. He has a special lesson for this infant church. He will never sit before you—his brow, as it used often to be, all radiant with emotion as he drank in the word and became too full for composure. His vacant seat will suggest our loss, and will long remind us of his punctuality in the prayer-meeting, Sabbath school, and his faithful observance of all the ordinances and privileges of the church. On whom his mantle shall fall as your spiritual rulers, we know not; but of this we feel assured, that God is interested in this church, or he would scarcely have called so dear a servant to give to it the closing chapter of his life, topping the climax of his usefulness here, and making this church the group of gazing disciples from whom he is taken into heaven. He in example is still with us, and to every one he says, Be in your place and fill it." Be not afraid of dying in the house of worship." "I would as soon die in the sanctuary," said he, "as anywhere." Follow him as he followed Christ; be as careful of evil speaking, of fault-finding as was he, and like him shun all *appearance* of evil, all the presumptions of indolence and indifference, and the God of peace stablish, strengthen, settle you, that men may know as well where always to find you. He speaks especially to parents, and says, "Be sure to come after me with your children!"

10. He teaches the value of benevolent institutions, and the neces-

sity of looking after the morals of our city. He says, "Provide for the morally destitute!" "Remember the poor!" Much of his life was spent in efforts to elevate the degraded and alleviate the distressed. He loved to do good to the poor, for "God is their pay-master." He sympathized with the neglected, and even sacrificed his life for the destitute. His labors for them were well timed and wisely directed. No man without heavenly wisdom and thorough discipline in the school of adversity could have accomplished what he performed in this metropolis. He was, in the truest sense, a wise man, estimating things according to their true value, and seeking the best ends and the best means. Shall I be contradicted when I say David M. Wilson was chief among the benefactors of Washington? However many and noble have been the defenders of the Capital of the United States, there has not arisen a better than he. Our city has been morally besieged, and the adversary's invading forces have threatened the prosperity, peace, and purity of the city.

"Now there was in the besieged city a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered that city; yet no man remembered that same poor man. Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength; nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard." "Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroyeth much good." (Eecl., 9, 15.)

May the memory of this benefactor of the Federal City be cherished throughout the land with more veneration and regard than is common to the lot of unassuming benefactors!

11. He left for all decided testimony to the *realities* of our existence. After his conversion his life was no fiction or dreary sentimentalism, or visionary, fluctuating effort to do everything and accomplish nothing. He was eminently a practical man. His piety and discipline—his *life* was practical: it was a reality: his death was to him a glorious reality, and his last words were, "Think of the realities of eternity."

"Life is real—life is earnest,
And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul."

12. And finally, my friends, what does he teach us concerning affliction?

"His character was formed by a severe discipline." He was many times afflicted. He was called to follow in one week three of his children to the grave—to even close the eyes of one in death while the funeral services of another were in progress. Yet in all this he murmured not

against God, nor spoke unadvisedly with his lips. When one that was very dear to him was at the point of death, his hour for prayer arrived: he read the sacred word, and, as was his custom, commenced to sing a hymn. His aged mother interrupted him by the exclamation, "My dear son, how can you sing when your child is so soon to die!" He replied, "*Mother, I could sing praises to God if the world were on fire!*"

His afflictions had taught his dependence on God, and given assurance in the divine promise; he could, therefore, sing in his suffering, and praise God even in death: it had quickened his own exertions to do good, and taught him to exemplify the truth that personal effort is strictly compatible with divine sovereignty. Life should be active, and God should be trusted. Let no one repine in affliction with such an example, nor live in constant dread of death. If you be fit to die, you will not live too long nor die too soon. If not prepared, the Son of God commands "Be ye also ready."

To the immediate relatives he suggests at once the way to bear bereavements.

To his children, all of whom he led into the fold of Christ, and one of whom is already partaker of like precious office with himself, he says: "God is your Father! that is enough. Trust and love Him; for the Lord shall be thy light, 'and thy God thy glory.'"

Be not ashamed nor prodigal of your patrimony. Yours is a legacy greater than that of the millionaire. Through such a father you are elevated to the company of God's princes, and shall indeed be "kings and priests unto God."

Of the afflicted, heart-broken widow, who is unable to meet us here, what shall I say?

There was once an aged woman who was God's adopted child. She had been bereft of her only son, and she, moreover, was a widow. The weeds of mourning had been long about her. She had no child nor consort. She was indeed afflicted, and men hid, as it were, their faces from her. Her eyes were dim with age and tears; and soon the world was dark, for she was blind. Every dear object was banished from her sight; the earth had vanished, and the sky was gone; beauty and brightness were invisible; the sun rose and set without her knowledge, and perpetual night reigned, cold and starless, and the darkness of the grave surrounded her. Time seemed at an end, for succession of days was to her no longer. The next light that should burst upon her vision was that from the eternal world, and the next morning that of the resurrection. Her afflictions were unrivalled by any earthly sorrow, and she seemed indeed disconsolate. Who *could* bring consolation to *such*

a widow? He alone who wept at the grave of Lazarus could do it. He had said to her, "I will not leave you comfortless!" As the stars go out in daytime, and are seen best when the sun and moon are withdrawn from us, so the lights of heaven shone more clearly to this aged widow for the darkness of her night of years, and the lights beyond the dark valley of the shadow of death were shining most distinctly before her mental vision, and her God was her light in all her darkness, her support in all her sorrow, her companion in all her loneliness;—and He was the God of that widowed, childless, sightless mother, till her mind had almost lost connexion with the outward world—till no human voice could wake her; then, with the same word that shall wake the dead, He spake to her, and she, responsive, answered with her fluttering wings, and flew on angels' pinions to the very home of Deity, where God and the Lamb are the light thereof. If such be the comfort of one so near disconsolate, what shall I not send to the widow of our departed comrade? Tell her, ye, her children, these words of the "Comforter:" "Cast thy burden on the Lord! He shall sustain thee! Behold, thy Maker is thy husband; the Lord of Hosts is His name!" "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you, saith the Lord thy Redeemer."

"MY GOD IS ALL LIGHT!"

A correspondent of the Puritan Recorder has contributed to that paper the following beautiful stanzas on the dying words of Mr. DAVID M. WILSON, of Washington :

No shadow on the good man's brow,
 No darkness in his sight ;
 'Tis heaven begun on earth below ;
 Forever past each night of woe—
 Eternity is light.

The silent stream had breadth nor depth,
 The foot ne'er touched its brink,
 But onward, upward, o'er the flood,
 The soul's eye fixed on Judah's God—
 There was no death to drink.

The gates of pearl are folded back
 By Christ, in victory's hour,
 While yonder stands the wondrous harp,
 Waiting the blood-washed, faithful heart,
 To wake its mighty power.

Earth gently passed from out of sight,
 Like morning dreams beyond the night,
 And not a billow dared to swell,
 When heavenward sped the soul to tell
 That God on earth is light.

Methinks upon the mourner's heart
 There falls a breath from heaven,
 Filling all avenues of love,
 Lifting the tear-dimmed eye above,
 Beyond the cloud that's riven.

"My God is light!" falls on the ear—
 And Lebanon is fair ;
 Had I a thousand lives to live,
 Oh ! that were small for me to give,
 The light of God to share.

Time !—time is but a dying breath !
 Eternity !—*that* has no death,
 But night and morning meet around
 The Throne eternal without sound,
 And never cloud or darkness rests
 Upon the mount of Zion's crest ;
 But glory beams forever bright,
 For God is light—"My God is light!"

Mrs. H. E. S. DAY.

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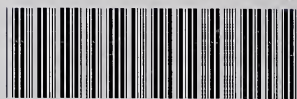


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